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ABSTRACT

This literature review of published research findings on parental involvement and literacy was undertaken to support the information needs of the National Literacy Trust, policymakers and educational providers in the United Kingdom (UK). Parental involvement and family involvement is a core value of the National Literacy Trust and underpins its philosophy that the literate society begins in the home and is sustained by home literacy practices and culture. Priority in the literature review was given to UK sources on parental involvement published in the 1990s, although some evaluations of the 1980s were included because of their important contribution to the field. Some international sources were also included when UK literature was lacking. The aim of the review was to summarize the published findings and to identify the activities in the home that contribute to children's literacy. Following a Preface and an Executive Summary, the review is divided into these sections: (1) Introduction; (2) The Role of Parents: The Trust's Position; (3) Main Findings in the Literature on Parental Involvement (Early Years; School Years); (4) Interventions and the Evidence (Interventions in the Early Years; School Age Interventions); (5) Way Forward; and (6) Conclusions. (Contains 103 references, 18 recommended resources, and 1 figure.) (NKA)

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CONSULTATION PAPER

May 2001

Parental involvement and literacy achievement:

The research evidence and the way forward

A review of the literature prepared by the National Literacy Trust

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Preface

The literature review of published research findings on parental involvement and literacy was undertaken to support the information needs of the National Literacy Trust, policy-makers and educational providers in the United Kingdom.

Parental involvement, and indeed family involvement, is a core value of the National Literacy Trust and underpins its philosophy that the literate society begins in the home and is sustained by home literacy practices and culture. Since the Haringey project of the 1980s, which demonstrated significant gains in children's reading achievement as a result of parental intervention, there have been different opinions amongst academics on the aspects of parental involvement and family life that contribute to children's literacy achievement.

The Trust perceived the need for clarification on the status and evolution of the debate in recent years, particularly since the Government has emphasised some forms of parental involvement in its educational strategies and community programmes (DfEE, 2001b). While the Trust supports these endeavours, it recognises the importance of open debate and flexible policy. It also emphasises the importance of successful evidentially-based initiatives in order to ensure positive learning outcomes for children and learners and a positive culture for parents and carers. In addition to investigating the research evidence surrounding common claims of long-term gains and the cost-effectiveness of parental involvement, there is a need to identify potential areas for further research as part of identifying ways forward in policy and practice.

The review was undertaken at the Institute of Education at the University of London. Priority was given to the UK sources on parental involvement published in the last decade, although some evaluations of the 1980s were included because of their important contribution to the field. Some international sources were also considered when UK literature was lacking.

The review covers research on parental involvement for children from birth to the age of 16. This meant that a wide range of literature was consulted on research that either demonstrates quantitative gains or isolates crucial aspects of parent/child dynamics that impact on literacy. Two approaches to evaluating parental involvement were considered. To access quantitative gains using school measures, sources encompassing the approach of psychologists using pre and post test treatment measurements of reading, by control groups or through statistical analysis were examined. The socio-cultural approach, whereby literacy is viewed outside 'school literacy', gave access to literacy practices already occurring in the home and community particularly among individuals belonging to EAL or low SES groups who do not participate in school practices.

Given the breadth of the review, one can not provide a comprehensive summary of different parental programmes or activities that one would expect of a narrower study. There are plenty of evaluations of school programmes and interventions that are not included and many omissions in international studies-- all of which place constraints on

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the conclusions made here. **Nonetheless, as this review seeks to stimulate discussion on parental involvement and was not intended to provide the final word on the subject, the Trust would welcome comments and information on omitted research evidence.**

The study targets the UK generally but it is recognised that the different terminology used to describe the school curriculums of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland can cause confusion. The majority of research findings that were consulted relate to England and therefore English terminology predominates throughout the text. Wherever possible, however, reference is made more generally to 'primary' and 'secondary'. The term 'parents' is equally problematic in that it has tended to exclude carers. In this case 'parents' includes carers so that both terms are used interchangeably throughout the text.

The National Literacy Trust makes this paper available on its website and in hard copy on request. The review is intended as the starting point for further discussion and publications to reinforce the effective activities of schools and parental organisations working to promote parental involvement. We would welcome in particular readers' comments on our recommendations for further research and policy activity.

We want to thank the Esmee Fairbairn Trust for the financial support that enabled the Trust to carry out this work. We also want to thank the following people for having read earlier drafts of this document and for having offered their suggestions in the first round of consultations: Angela Anning, Roger Beard, Eve Gregory, Angela Hobsbaum, Iram Siraj-Blatchford, Lyn Tett, Keith Topping, Jo Weinberger and Sheila Wolfendale. Others wanting to comment on the paper can do so electronically on the Trust's website or by sending comments to Robin Close, National Literacy Trust, Swire House, 59 Buckingham Gate, London, SW1E 6AJ. Please send requests for permission to copy or cite the paper to the same address.

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Executive Summary

Throughout 2000-1, the National Literacy Trust investigated the evidence on parental involvement and literacy achievement in published articles and books and prepared this literature review and position statement.

The aim of the review was to summarise the published findings and to identify the activities in the home that contribute to children's literacy. It sought to identify the most effective means of encouraging and supporting parents and carers to help their children become competent and confident readers and writers and to suggest the best way forward for policy-makers, educational providers and parental organisations. It is important to recognise, however, that activities that support literacy in one instance may not work in all contexts, particularly where there are language and cultural differences.

The following conclusions were drawn from the review of what benefits children's literacy at home:

- evaluation of parental programmes has been difficult as a result of methodological problems and funding shortages in relating parental influences to other influences (ie. socio-economic status). There is a shortage of longitudinal evidence and empirical evaluations of parental programmes in the UK, yet there are many indicators in research that parents can positively influence their children's literacy.
- Early intervention is important because parental activities at home (such as parents reading to their children, books in the home, library attendance, parent-child relationships) partially account for disparities in performance between children at school entry.
- Parent-centred approaches such as Sheffield's ORIM framework and family literacy may raise parents' confidence in supporting the development of their children's literacy. Structured programmes that provide support for parents are effective in raising literacy achievement with potential long-term effects. Parental involvement in school interventions require well thought out structures in order to be effective and to involve parents.
- Some parents are at risk of 'exclusion' from interventions because of their own reading difficulties or because of different language and cultural backgrounds.
- Children, including weak readers and additional language learners, may benefit from 'parents listening to children read' and structured programmes such as Paired Reading. These interventions involve parents interacting and conversing with their children around text.

The National Literacy Trust makes the following recommendations:

- The Trust calls for more research into the impact of parents' reading behaviour and attitudes on:
  - children's reading development
  - gender influences

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- methods for involving parents with low literacy skills and low socio-economic status,
- the impact of ICT on home literacy and parental involvement
- and the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of different approaches.

- The Trust recommends a national agenda and specifies funding requirements for evidence-based and cost-effective programmes that develop parents' knowledge and skills in literacy. These would include:
  - Provision of resources for schools to bid into the Standards Fund to offer support for parents in addition to family literacy.
  - Funding of small-scale cost-effective non-school initiatives with evaluative dimensions that encourage parents to read and write with their children.
  - More flexible funding for family literacy and family learning programmes that is not tied to the delivery of specific programmes.

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1. Introduction

This report reviews research literature on parental involvement and literacy achievement. Priority has been given to UK research in order to identify 'what works' in the UK context, although some international sources are consulted where potentially relevant to the UK setting.

Parental involvement in the context of this report refers to both the spontaneous informal contributions of parents and carers toward children's learning in the home and the formal organised inclusion of parents and carers in programmes that target children's literacy skills in the pre-school and school years. Parental involvement for children between 0-16 years of age is considered in the review, although emphasis has been placed on the early years and primary school and the implications of early cognitive and language development for later learning. While institutional literacy programmes that involve parents are considered, specific home activities such as reading to children, listening to children read are also analysed and compared. The question of long-term vs short-term benefits for learners is of particular importance because of the implications for policy decisions that are largely based on cost-effectiveness.

The message from the literature on parental involvement and literacy is that there is as much agreement as disagreement among researchers on the ways that the home environment impacts on children's performance at school, the effectiveness of parental intervention and the extent to which parents should be involved. There are concerns also about the impact of home-school links on carers who may be further excluded by a home-school agenda. Strategies that involve training and support for parents such as Paired Reading are more widely regarded as being effective.

The recent emphasis on evidence-based practice means that research increasingly serves as a powerful tool for justifying policy agendas. The context for this review is timely as the Government is pursuing a stronger role in pre-school intervention and greater home-school links. 'Parental involvement', therefore, implies the interconnection of the home environment and school based curriculum with social outcomes and the wider political agenda.

In the political realm, parental influences on children's learning are being linked to intellectual and social skills perceived to be essential for the 21st century. Brain skills in particular are increasingly important to the Government's educational agenda. "The application of insights into emotional intelligence (Daniel Goleman) or seven intelligences (Howard Gardner) or learnable intelligence (David Perkins) in schools is just the beginning" (Barber, 2000). Consequently, the Government is exploring whether or not learning is enhanced by structured intervention prior to school. A House of Commons Select Committee explored this in terms of when critical learning takes place and the point at which intervention can ensure best output gains for learning development (House of Commons, 2000). Research in this area will affect Government approaches to pre-school provision and literacy in the early years. Understanding environmental influences such as parental influences on children's educational performance is important

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to this educational and increasingly scientific debate. The debate should subsequently impact the behaviour and methodology of literacy practitioners. This review seeks to offer a firmer evidential basis for such practice. It is both timely and essential.

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2. The role of parents: The Trust's position.

The National Literacy Trust takes the position that parents, grandparents and siblings have a significant role to play in children's educational development and achievement and in cultivating an enjoyment of learning. The Trust is directly involved in promoting parental and family involvement through operating Reading Is Fundamental, UK, an organisation that encourages the love of reading by way of book ownership, and The National Reading Campaign, sponsored by the Department for Education and Employment. In both cases, community support and participation provide powerful reinforcements for the literacy culture in the home.

Literacy is not merely a school agenda. The Trust has argued that literacy in the home and community is equally important in ensuring sustainable literacy habits and learning outcomes if not more so. For this reason, the National Reading Campaign's emphasis on literacy as community, family and individual practices is central to improving and developing literacy in this country.

It is important that parents and carers are aware of the significant contribution they can make to their children's learning by supporting at home the school's literacy agenda. In addition, parental activity around language, reading and writing that is child/parent driven and is not primarily focused on raising school achievement must also be encouraged.

Educating children is a challenging endeavour, which may intimidate some parents and carers. Literacy is a complex skill that requires a supportive environment and takes years to master. The Trust wishes to investigate the most effective methods for supporting parents so that they have the confidence, motivation and skills to develop their children's reading, writing, speaking and listening skills.

Parental involvement, where adult and child share a learning, loving, relationship, ensures support for children beyond literacy and in all areas of educational development. Parents and carers need support from the media, the wider community, and local and central government in addition to the school. There must also be more consideration for what is the best use of adults' time and how adults with poor literacy skills can help their children, and receive help with their own literacy.

The impetus to encourage carers to initiate, sustain or develop involvement in their children's learning must be handled sensitively. It should not place counter-productive pressures on either adults or children. Parental involvement requires careful and thoughtful approaches that reflect the exigencies of family life, the realities of poverty and low literacy levels, and the complexities and uncertainties of parenthood for many adults.

There are many questions that need to be answered on the best means of carrying forward this notion of parental involvement in literacy:

- How do we avoid the dangers of counter-productive pressures?

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- How can we ensure that carers with children in the later stages of primary and secondary education recognise their continuing but changing role?
- What are the best ways to support and to communicate to parents and families the importance of their role as educators in a range of formal (daycare and school) and non-formal settings (libraries, community centres, tenant associations)?
- What are the mechanisms for getting adults to engage actively in their children's learning and their own learning?
- How can we achieve a balance between the responsibilities and purposes of schools and carers?

According to the research literature, the following literacy skills are some of the characteristics of early literacy that predict later achievement:

- Demonstrating letter identification before age five (Tizard, Blatchford, Burke, Farquhar and Plewis, 1988)
- understanding narrative and story (Meek, 1982; Wells, 1987)
- understanding writing functions (Teale and Sulzby, 1986; Hall, 1987)
- having favourite books (Weinberger,1996)
- knowing nursery rhymes (Maclean, Bryant and Bradley, 1987)
- demonstrating some phonological awareness (Goswami and Bryant, 1990; Stainthorp, 1999)
- being capable of explanatory talk (Crain-Thoreson and Dale, 1992; Dickenson and Beals, 1994)

Based on the above evidence, the Trust considers the following literacy activities between parents and children to be important:

- carers reading to and with their children a whole variety of texts, although there may be value in repeated reading of favourite texts
- carers encouraging children to listen and talk and thereby develop communication skills
- carers developing their children's understanding of different letter sounds and patterns
- carers pointing out letters and words in their children's daily lives
- carers encouraging their children to write according to their stage of development
- carers and their children sharing in literacy leisure activities such as going to the library, buying books, participating in literacy-oriented computer activities, and talking about books, newspapers and magazines that they read
- carers recognising and acknowledging their children's successes, and thereby building their children's self-confidence.

The Trust believes that these activities have implications wider than literacy and will reinforce many of the Government's learning objectives as well as affect children's lifelong learning behaviour. (see Figure 1)

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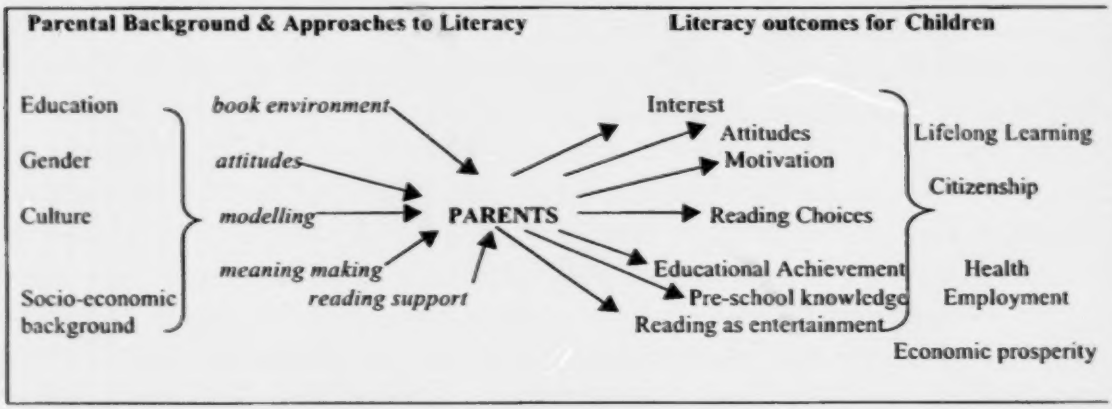
Figure 1: Scope of parental influences on children's development



This model is applicable to older children and young people even though there is very little research for the later years as to how carers can support their children. The following review of the research literature suggests that there are many other areas of parental involvement that may be helpful for literacy but which are not yet supported by research evidence. By outlining the debate on 'what works', the Trust hopes to challenge and broaden mainstream thinking on parental involvement and to encourage further research in areas that may pave the way for future policy.

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3. Main findings in the literature on parental involvement and literacy

The following section provides a broad overview of the research findings concerning the importance of parental involvement in the early years and at school. It outlines the many different and significant ways parents and carers contribute to children's literacy. The UK literature and the international sources that were consulted indicate that there is no research that has shown that parental involvement has no impact at all on literacy. A more comprehensive analysis of intervention types appears in Section 4.

3.1 Early Years and pre-school:

3.1.1 Home and parental environment and cognitive development:

- Home influences are the strongest predictors of children's attainment scores on entry to pre-school (age 3) (Sammons, Sylva, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Smees, Dobson, Jeavons, Lewis, Morahan and Sadler, 2000).
  - Influences on children between 0-3 are: (Sammons *et al*, 2000).
    - frequency with which the child plays with letters/numbers at home
    - parents' drawing children's attention to sounds and letters
    - frequency with which parents read to their child and frequency of library visits
    - parents teaching their child songs or nursery rhymes
  - Parents who introduce their babies to books may give them a head start in school, giving them an advantage over their peers throughout primary school (Wade and Moore, 2000a; 2000b).

- Parent/family characteristics such as free-school meals, mother's educational background, and other indicators of socio-economic background also relate to attainment at entry to school (Sammons *et al*, 2000).
  -Parents' level of education correlates with the cognitive development of babies between 12 months and 27 months of age (Roberts, Bornstein, Slater and Barrett, 1999).
  - The amount of literacy materials available in the home are related to social class differences which is linked to reading achievement and cognition. (Stuart, Dixon, Masterson and Quinlan, 1998) The lack of exposure to letters of the alphabet by school entry among low socio-economic status (SES) children delays their ability to acquire foundation-level literacy (a cognitive framework that consists of recognition and storage of words and the ability to decode words on the basis of spelling-sound correspondences) (Duncan and Seymour, 2000).

- Parents' attitudes and support towards their children's learning influence performance on literacy tests irrespective of socio-economic statuts (Tizard, Blatchford, Burke, Farquhar and Plewis, 1988; Wells, 1987).
  -Precocious reading among children, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds entering reception and kindergarten, has been traced to parents'

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activities and practices in literacy, ie. reading to their children, helping with homework in later years, holding high expectations for educational achievement (Clark, 1976; Stainthorp, 1999).

- Children who are read to at an early age tend to display greater interest in reading at a later age (Arnold and Whitehurst, 1994.)
  - Story reading at home enhances children's language comprehension and expressive language skills (Crain-Thoreson and Dale, 1992).
  - Oral language developed from parent/child reading predicts later writing development (Crain-Thoreson, Bloomfield, Anthony, Bacon, Phillips and Samwel, 1999).

3.1.2 Combined parent and pre-school intervention:

- Combined parent and pre-school intervention for children from disadvantaged home backgrounds leads to significant educational and social outcomes (Schweinhart, Barnes and Weikart, 1993).
  - Pre-school provision can address inequalities in cognitive development (Sammons *et al*, 2000).
  - Early stimulation is essential for later reading skills. In cases of severe disadvantage, pre-school environments that alter or compensate for learning poor environments in the home can help prevent learning difficulties (Wasik and Karweit, 1994).

3.2 School years

3.2.1 Home environment:

- The presence of books and computers in the home show a causal relationship with educational achievement (Weinberger, 1996).
  - Children who do well in literacy at age 7 have favourite books at age 3 (Weinberger, 1996).
  - Reading comprehension is related to provision of books in the home, conversations between adults and children about the content of books and articles they have read, and a high degree of parental support and expectation for academic achievement (Snow, 1991).

- Low frequency of leisure reading is associated with low achievement (Brooks, Gorman, Harman, Hutchinson, Kinder, Moor and Wilkin, 1997).

3.2.2 School initiated parental involvement and home reading:

- For children between the age of 5-14, reading activity at home has significant positive influence on students' reading achievement, attitudes towards reading and attentiveness in the classroom (Rowe, 1991).

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- Knowledge of the reading patterns of the home language assists teachers in recognising the strategies used by bilingual children in their reading in English, which, in turn, helps identify any difficulties or long-term reading problems (Gregory, 1996a; Kenner, 1999).

- The involvement of parents in school initiated interventions raises achievement when the structures are in place for effective partnerships (Wolfendale and Bastiani, 2000).
  -Programmes that encourage home reading increase parental understanding of how children learn to read (Hancock and Gale, 1996; Poulson, Macleod, Bennett and Wray, 1997). Parents who have received training and are confident can help improve poor readers' interest in and enthusiasm for reading and their reading competence (Toomey, 1993).
  -Focused interventions such as Paired Reading are effective, if properly implemented, in raising reading attainment, the gains enduring at follow-up (Brooks, 1998; Topping and Lindsay, 1992).
  - Parents who listen to their children read contribute to their child's success in school (Tizard, 1982) and this intervention works well for weak readers and minority groups (Macleod, 1996).
  - Mothers of low socio-economic status who increase their communicative interaction during book reading, namely commenting on text and relating it to the children's experiences, improve their children's literacy skills (Hockenberger, Goldstein and Haas, 1999).

3.2.3 Children who have learnt alongside their parents in family literacy programmes:

- Children in Basic Skills Agency family literacy programmes demonstrate long-term benefits in scholastic achievement and gains in confidence, vocabulary, reading and progress in writing.
  -Parents also gain confidence in supporting their children and are more likely to develop an interest in education (Brooks *et al*, 1997; Poulson *et al*, 1997).

- Families from minority backgrounds benefit the most from the BSA family literacy programmes, especially those families with children aged 3-6 and 8-9 (Brooks *et al*, 1997).

4. Interventions and the evidence:

The following section considers the literature on the different UK intervention types in the early years and school years. More detailed accounts of specific interventions and their evaluations may be found elsewhere (Brooks *et al*, 1998; Wolfendale and Topping, 1996; Wolfendale, 1999).

4. 1 Interventions in the early years

4.1.1 Books for babies:

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For the 0-3 age range, professionals advocate the early introduction of books. Bookstart, a Book Trust initiative, has been particularly successful in promoting the books for babies concept and has been involved in longitudinal research with Birmingham University. The aim of Bookstart is to raise awareness among parents of the importance of establishing a relationship around books with their children in infancy. The Bookstart evaluation demonstrated that Bookstart children had a head start at school as a result of the programme, and gave some indication that early engagement with books prepared the way for scholastic achievement. The researchers claim that the advantage was maintained in the first two years of schooling, although further research in this area is required using larger samples if the benefits of this sort of intervention are to be convincing (Wade, 2000b). A national study is being carried out by the University of Surrey, which may shed further light on the long-term effectiveness of the Bookstart scheme.

A small evaluation of the Kirklees Books for Babies scheme determined that the positive outcomes of the scheme lay in the change of parental attitudes toward supporting their children. The parental support aspect of the Kirklees programme was regarded by the researchers to be more significant than the babies' exposure to books because it helped to change parental attitudes toward their own parenting skills and literacy (Hardman and Jones, 1999). This question of the importance of parental support needs to be addressed by the Bookstart researchers themselves if the Bookstart model is to be widely adopted.

4.1.2 Parents reading to their children:

Parents' reading to their children in the pre-school years is regarded as an important predictor of literacy achievement (Weinberger, 1996). This parental activity is associated with strong evidence of benefits for children such as language growth, reading achievement and writing (Bus, Ijzendoorn and Pellegrini, 1995; Brooks, 2000). Parents' reading to their children is associated with the attributes of precocious reading in young children (Clark, 1976; Stainthorp, 1999). Benefits include the enhancement of children's language comprehension and expressive language skills, listening and speaking skills, later enjoyment of books and reading, understanding narrative and story and good reading ability at age 7 (Wells, 1987; Crain-Thoreson and Dale, 1992; Weinberger, 1996). The recent Effective Provision for Pre-school Education study has also found that the frequency with which parents reported reading to their children and the frequency of library visits had a significant impact on children's cognitive development at pre-school entry regardless of socio-economic status (Sammons *et al*, 2000). As suggested by an American review, future research should be focussed on isolating aspects of shared reading that are most beneficial. (Scarborough and Dobrich, 1994)

4.1.3 Pre-school provision:

For parents with children in the 3-5 range, pre-school provision can provide them with the opportunity to discover methods they can use to enhance their children's learning. It is on this principle that Sure Start and the Early Excellence Centres for children under 5 are based and reflect the Government's endorsement of schemes that involve parents in

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children's early learning. There is a need for rigorous evaluation of these costly initiatives.

The Effective Provision for Pre-school Education study has sought to establish the differences in pre-school provision that determine children's learning outcomes. Although playgroups rely extensively on parental involvement, the EPPE findings suggest that teacher education and qualifications that are higher at pre-school centres than nurseries and playgroups influence better outcomes. This suggests that parental involvement alone, however important, is insufficient to ensure positive learning outcomes. The quality of institutional pre-school environments is another factor (Sammons *et al*, 2000).

A prominent parent/child-centred approach to literacy learning in pre-school is the ORIM framework designed by researchers at Sheffield University. (**O**pportunities for literacy learning, **R**ecognition of the child's achievements, **I**nteraction around literacy activities, **M**odel of literacy) The researchers argue that institutional pre-school provision alone cannot and will not raise levels of achievement without recognition of parental contributions toward learning. Hannon and his colleagues at Sheffield designed the ORIM framework to assist parents of pre-school children to take an active part in developing their child's literacy. The team's framework has raised the profile of home-learning opportunities, but the team has not yet completed their evaluation of this framework (Hannon, 1996). The REAL project (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy), an evaluation of the ORIM framework to be completed in 2002, may provide rich data on whether or not the framework is effective. The researchers are investigating 'what works' in their programme, which places emphasis on environmental print, books, early writing and aspects of oral language.

Parents are often insufficiently aware of the kinds of activities that can aid their children's literacy learning (Harrison, 1996). The ORIM framework is aimed at helping practitioners to work with parents and provides detailed information for parents on activities for promoting literacy. This kind of knowledge may substantially improve the educational chances of many children.

4.2 School age interventions:

4.2.1 Listening to children read:

'Listening to children read' is an intervention that was used and evaluated in the Haringey project during the 1980s. The activity involves parents and carers listening to their children read texts brought home from school. The evaluation of the Haringey project demonstrated significant learning gains for participating children between ages 6-8 (Tizard *et al*, 1982). A follow-up study of the Haringey children also indicated positive signs three years later compared to children who received only teacher help (Hewison, 1988).

The Haringey project has since been criticised for methodological design flaws along with the Belfield project (Hannon, 1987), which failed to produce similar results. In

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particular, criticism has centred on imperfect control conditions. According to Macleod, who is the most critical of these studies, school influences were not adequately accounted for in these studies and the researchers ignored all other manifestations of literacy in the home (Macleod, 1996). Despite the discrepancy in the results, these studies are still regarded as seminal studies as they paved the way to later work.

There is evidence that less-able readers seem to benefit from interventions with emphasis on parents listening to their children read. The Haringey intervention demonstrated that children from minority and multi-lingual backgrounds tended to benefit (Siraj-Blatchford, 1998; Brooks, 1998). Hannon's Belfield study, which involved mostly white children, yielded different results from the Haringey project because of the different socio-economic and cultural setting of his project (Hannon, 1987; Macleod, 1994). Like parents reading to their children in the early years, therefore, this intervention could be both beneficial and cost-effective amongst children in pre-school and school age, depending on their literacy needs (Macleod, 1996).

It has been suggested that 'listening to children read' is a passive means of parents supporting their children's reading (Brooks, 1998). However, parents who converse and interact with their children while listening to their children read raise the potential value of the activity (Greenhough and Hughes, 1998). Paired Reading, a guided activity where the parent reads aloud with the child and then allows the child to read aloud alone, appears to have more success (Topping and Lindsay, 1992; Brooks, 1998).

4.2.2 Paired Reading:

Paired Reading is a popular and widely used teaching technique throughout the United Kingdom because it is simple and inexpensive in time and resources for both schools and parents. Although usually aimed at primary school children of all abilities, the approach also can be used for older children with low literacy skills. This mediated learning technique can involve parents as well as peers, enabling parents to learn strategies to stimulate and encourage their children's learning. Similar methods for writing, spelling and thinking have been developed and evaluated (Topping, 2001).

The technique involves adult and child reading aloud together. The adult eventually withdraws leaving the child to read independently. In the event where the child has difficulty or makes an error, there are strategies for intervening. A similar approach is the 'Pause, Prompt, Praise' technique that carers can learn to encourage independent reading, particularly among children with reading difficulties. During the reading session, the tutor pauses when the child makes a mistake, prompts the child if the word has not been correctly identified and offers praise for self-corrections. (Merrett, 1994)

Paired Reading with parents as tutors has been extensively evaluated. Its particular strength is the fact that both tutor and tutee learn together and receive training and support. The learner experiences greater confidence and fluency and self-correction as well as better phonic skills and greater reading accuracy (Topping, 1995).

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An evaluation of the Paired Reading in Kirklees Project, where schools and other agencies trained and supported parents in the use of Paired Reading, demonstrated that the intervention was successful on a variety of levels for children, including those in disadvantaged areas (Topping and Lindsay, 1992; Topping, 1995, 2001; Brooks, 1998). There were gains in reading accuracy and reading comprehension. Boys involved in the project made somewhat greater gains than girls. In parental feedback questionnaires, more than 70% of parents reported greater confidence in the children, children reading more widely, enjoying reading more and making fewer mistakes (Topping, 1995, 2001).

Although it has been suggested that there is no measure in place to support the claim that reading behaviour is altered at home or school, Paired Reading provides a positive foundation for parents to further their children's literacy development (Fraser, 1997; Topping, 1995).

4.2.3 Family literacy:

There are many similarities between parental involvement in reading programmes and family literacy, although in this section, the family literacy model of the Basic Skills Agency is specifically considered in contrast to earlier parental involvement interventions. This distinction is based solely on the fact that the largest evaluation to date of family literacy has been those programmes run by the Basic Skills Agency which constitute only one model for family literacy programmes. This section looks specifically at the evidence for the effectiveness of these programmes and the response to this notion of family literacy.

The perennial question is what is "family literacy"? As Topping has pointed out, "some of the early parental involvement in reading programmes always had strong family literacy overtones, while others have developed these over the years" and, conversely, some programmes have adopted the family literacy title because it is fashionable without many of the identifying features (Topping, 1996). These features include children getting assistance with their reading, parents learning how to help their children read, reading with their children, parents improving their own skills, and a strong focus on the literacy needs and purposes of the family, not just those of the school. Concern for parents addressing their learning needs and the causal relationship with intergenerational illiteracy and poverty has lead to specific strands of government funding for programmes that target these issues. The Basic Skills Agency has been at the forefront of this initiative, while other approaches, reliant on other funding sources, address family learning from the perspective of community needs and learning processes (Harrison, 1996; Taylor, 1999).

The evaluation of the Basic Skills Agency's programmes by the National Foundation for Educational Research demonstrated that these improved parents' and children's literacy. In particular, the report indicated that young children and their parents are more likely to participate and to benefit than families with older children. The evaluation found that these programmes successfully encouraged adults to improve their own skills in an effort to help their children and to pursue further education (Brooks *et al*, 1997; Poulson, 1997).

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Although, according to Hannon, the NFER study is "evidence-based, well designed, efficient in use of resources, technically highly competent and clearly reported," it does not answer the fundamental question as to "whether or not these programmes are any better for children than stand-alone programmes or flexible family literacy programmes" (Hannon, 1997). In other words, there is no way of judging as yet how the reported effectiveness of the Basic Skills Agency's family literacy programmes compares with the educational outcomes and cost-effectiveness of other programmes. It is also misleading to assume that children's characteristics can be identified according to their parents' educational background (Hannon, 1999).

There are concerns that the Basic Skills Agency model is represented as the main model of family literacy learning because it has been evaluated quantitatively. There is a wide-range of family literacy programmes involved in community learning which have not yet been evaluated and which receive little financial support (Bird and Pahl, 1994). Future evaluations of these programmes will provide data to compare outcomes and benefits with other similar interventions. Furthermore, there are parental programmes with family literacy and learning dimensions such as the REAL project, PACT and Paired Reading, which need to be put into the equation of what constitutes effective family literacy practice (Wolfendale and Topping, 1996).

4.2.4 Home-school links:

Currently, there is greater recognition that school effectiveness is related to improvements in communication between home and school, parental participation in school and school encouragement of parental support for their children's learning at home. In order to encourage parental involvement, since September 1999, all primary schools in England were required to put in place home-school agreements to strengthen the role of parents in the learning process. The Basic Skills Agency supports this endeavour with its Quality Mark for primary and secondary schools (Wolfendale, 2001). The National Literacy Strategy itself encourages teachers to use parents as volunteers in the classroom and parents to assist children with reading and writing homework in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. (Department for Education and Employment, 1997) While it is believed that greater links between the home and school can raise literacy levels, progress is often difficult to measure (Wolfendale and Bastiani, 2000). The research also suggests that there are numerous other difficulties to this relationship that require consideration at the policy level and are specified below.

Underlying the National Literacy Strategy is the notion that all parents have a responsibility to assist schools to meet literacy targets (Literacy Task Force, 1997). Furthermore, parents require school guidance and support to deliver home literacy, while schools require the support of parents (Hirst, 1998; Hannon, 1996; Blackledge, 1999). In the case of home-school initiatives, there are implications of increased school intervention for family life. The emphasis on home-school agreements may have a negative impact on children from literacy-poor homes if parents do not participate as a result of poor experiences of school or their own literacy skills (Clark *et al*, 1999). The

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situation may improve if schools offer support for parents with low literacy levels, (Hallgarten, 2000) yet there are still many barriers to involving parents, such as negative experiences of school and cultural and language barriers that need to be addressed within the system (Nakagawa, 2000).

There is evidence that misunderstandings and inconsistencies arise in home-school programmes that limit the effectiveness of parental involvement. Hughes *et al* found in 1993 that parents had very little understanding of the nature of school-based education (Hughes, Wikely and Nash, 1993). An Exeter University study evaluated home-school programmes and found that parents felt that they received very little information on the school's philosophy of teaching reading and on the ways that children learn reading. Books sent home by the teachers were not being used in the manner intended by the school; parents treated the books as an assessment exercise rather than time for reading for pleasure with their children. The researchers point out that "It remains to be seen, therefore, whether the renewed stress on the importance of phonics and decoding skills will halt or alter the direction of the move to involve parents in the teaching of reading." The fact that parents were not communicating 'reading for pleasure' is a problem that may have implications for the development of lasting positive reading habits associated with motivation (Wragg, Wragg, Haynes and Chamberlin, 1998).

There is concern that there will be additional pressure placed on home-school programmes to demonstrate long-term gains and effectiveness as a result of the Government's target-setting. The tendency of these programmes has been to obtain anecdotal evidence of experience and organisational success because data collection by schools is difficult when there is a shortage of staff and funding to carry out quantitative research (Brooks, 1998). Some evaluations have shown that few schools have motivation or time to evaluate home programmes in terms of measured reading gains (Hancock and Gale, 1996). Furthermore, it is difficult to give parental involvement its due credit when test scores are the main criterion measure (Wolfendale, 1996; Hannon 1996b; Topping 1996b). It is more realistic, according to Wolfendale, to consider the 'value added' components of parental involvement which offer "a way of singling out what it is parents contribute without having to rely solely on often spurious or misleading statistics" (Wolfendale, 1999). The task of programme organisers is to employ a framework of evaluation appropriate to the programme that demonstrates that the client groups have benefited (Wolfendale and Bastiani, 2000).

4.3. Summary:

4.3.1 'What works'

Interventions in the early years: Early intervention is key to establishing home cultures that foster literacy.

- Books for babies in the Bookstart programme develops a culture of reading in the home for parents and their children that can establish lifelong patterns of learning and motivation. More longitudinal evidence from a national study should seek to establish overall educational gains.

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- The simple activity of parents reading to their children and sharing books in the pre-school years affects children's early language comprehension, listening and speaking skills, understanding of narrative and story, and attitudes toward reading, all of which prepare them for school.
- Parent-centred approaches to pre-school education such as the ORIM framework may raise parents' confidence by informing them of strategies that are appropriate for laying the ground work for literacy. Results from the REAL project will indicate whether ORIM is effective.

Interventions at school age: Structured programmes, training for parents and heterogeneous approaches to including parents can ensure that children with literacy difficulties receive the appropriate help.

- Parents listening to children read is effective amongst all children including less able readers, and children from minority and multi-lingual backgrounds. This activity is effective when reinforced by parents talking with their children.
- Paired Reading provides parents with an effective strategy for improving and developing their children's literacy. The approach is simple and has demonstrated measured gains in reading attainment and children's self-confidence as readers.
- Parents and children involved in the Basic Skills Agency family literacy programmes improve their literacy skills and participants develop positive attitudes toward learning.
- Home-school links can improve literacy among low-level readers and writers, but may 'exclude' parents with low literacy. Programmes run by schools require well-thought out structures for programme development and evaluation. There is a danger that exercises from school used at home can prevent parents communicating 'reading for pleasure', which may affect motivation.

4.3.2 What is not known:

- There is a shortage of longitudinal evidence that demonstrates long-term gains. It may not be reasonable to expect to be able trace effects of early literacy provision beyond age 7. This requires further consideration when long-term gains are linked to funding and issues of cost-effectiveness of literacy interventions.

- Research is lacking on comparisons of the effectiveness of the Basic Skills Agency's model with other family literacy programmes as well as with other stand-alone parent involvement programmes.

- More evidence is required on the changes of attitude or behaviour that occur as a result of home-school interventions.

- As research is limited to young children's literacy development, it is not clear which interventions are most effective amongst adolescents.

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- There is a shortage of research on relative effectiveness of different approaches to boys and girls and how this relates to relative participation of fathers or other male carers in home literacy activities.

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5. Way forward:

In reading the literature, it is clear that parental involvement has a potentially critical role to play in literacy from the early years onward. Approaches for encouraging parents and carers to be involved in children's literacy learning will and must vary depending on the client groups they serve. The particular needs and circumstances of both adults and children must always be at the forefront of any policy making and planning. The National Literacy Trust makes the following recommendations:

5.1 National agenda:

The National Literacy Trust appreciates the Government's commitment to increasing parental involvement in its Sure Start programmes, Early Excellence Centres and National Literacy Strategy. While evidence on the effectiveness of these strategies will emerge in the next few years, the National Literacy Trust seeks to continue to stimulate debate on the importance of parental involvement for literacy achievement. The Trust would like to emphasise that a national agenda for parental involvement in literacy must have community support and must not place counter productive demands on either adults or children. It is imperative that unrealistic expectations are not placed on carers that may cause guilt about their parenting skills or, as one researcher, John Raven, described might lead them "to adopt perceptions, expectations and behaviours which are psychologically damaging to themselves, which inhibit the growth of their children and which are dysfunctional in society" (Fraser, 1977).

The Trust would like to give particular attention to the following issues to be discussed among key organisations at a national and local level:

- strategies that empower carers to encourage their infants' language development (0-3)
- strategies to encourage and help carers to assist their children's writing development at home
- strategies to encourage carers of adolescents to participate in their children's literacy development
- recognition that each client group involves a range of cultural, linguistic and economic backgrounds with distinct requirements and that there cannot be any single homogeneous approach to parental involvement, particularly where adults with basic skills needs are concerned.

In order to maximise the effectiveness of this debate, a range of organisations including health, social and parental support agencies need to be involved.

5.2 Research requirements:

In order to develop further understanding of parental influences on children and young adults' literacy development, research is required in the following areas:

- *Attitudes toward reading learned from parents.* Research has not yet established whether children's competence is linked to parents' interest in reading and learning, particularly as children get older. The influence of existing attitudes as well as the impact of altered adults' attitudes to reading on children's reading behaviour may be difficult to measure yet potentially influential in the ways in which children approach literacy and come to regard themselves as readers.

- *Isolating gender influences of parents on children's literacy.* Some research has suggested that the absence of fathers' involvement at home and participation at school is linked to low achievement amongst boys, although the evidence for this is still inconclusive for literacy (Hall and Coles, 1990; Wragg, 1998). Do different linguistic and cognitive interactions with significant adults make literacy/print related activities appear more relevant to children? Do mothers and fathers have different impacts on their children's learning?

- *The inclusion of parents with poor literacy and low socio-economic status.* It is sometimes difficult to encourage parents with literacy problems or from low socio-economic status to participate. Evaluation of approaches that succeed toward the sustained involvement of parents from low socio-economic status, or with low literacy, and that demonstrate children's improvement in literacy would provide useful knowledge of the methods for engaging parents and their children from different backgrounds. In this regard, extended evaluations of family literacy initiatives are also needed.

- *The impact of ICT on home literacy cultures and on the involvement of parents.* The Institute for Public Policy Research has called for greater evaluation of how the use of ICT resources at home and school might impact on home-school relations (Hallgarten, 2000). There is also need for research on whether ICT is an effective medium in which to encourage parent/child centred literacy activities and whether ICT used in family literacy or other programmes improves children's reading skills or alters parents' attitudes toward learning over a sustained period of time.

- *The issue of effectiveness and cost-effectiveness for different approaches.* There is a shortage of research on differential effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of different approaches and specific practices with different target populations. In particular, greater consideration should be given to aptitude and treatment interactions.

5.3 Recommendations for Government:

There are several high leverage activities for promoting parental involvement in literacy that require Government funding:

- *Provision of resources for schools to bid into the Standards Fund to offer support for parents.* The 'Keeping Up With The Children' programme should be complemented by methods for parents to support their children's literacy, for example, through Paired Reading and Writing techniques.

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- *Funding of small-scale cost-effective non-school initiatives with evaluative dimensions that encourage parents to read and write with their children.* Evaluated programmes such as PEEP, the REAL Project, Success For All and the Share Project have provisional findings that indicate their effectiveness in working with children and their parents to raise literacy standards. The NFER is completing an evaluation of the Share Project at Key Stage 3 (results available in June 2001) and this may provide useful data concerning parental attitudes to learning as a result of using SHARE materials and support and may further develop work amongst parents of adolescents.

- *More flexible funding for family literacy and family learning programmes that is not tied to the delivery of specific programmes.* In addition to greater funding flexibility, there needs to be more thought given to how family literacy links with parental involvement in reading programmes and how these programmes can be taken further to help parents develop their own literacy. This is an area of current debate in light of the establishment of the learning and skills councils for post-16 education, making this question of new opportunities for programme diversity and funding both timely and significant.

At the time that this review was prepared, the National Literacy Strategy at Key Stage 3 did not provide sufficient guidance for schools on the ways to involve parents. Provision for carers in the Strategy should not be prescriptive, but offer suggestions on effective methods for encouraging parental participation. Carers of children in this age group can influence their children's reading choices, encourage reading for pleasure and talk with their children about what they read.

5.4. The Trust's commitment to continuing its work in promoting parental involvement:

The National Literacy Trust actively promotes parent/child interaction with text through Reading Is Fundamental, UK, and the National Reading Campaign. RIF, UK, has begun a pilot project called Shared Beginnings in Newcastle designed to alert carers to the importance of early language stimulation for infants and to encourage family engagements with books. The Trust through the NRC promotes the role of fathers as mentors to their sons in an ongoing effort to stimulate and encourage reading amongst boys, hence the ongoing Reading Champions initiative of the NRC.

Although the Trust acknowledges the importance of sustained parental support for children between the ages of 0-16, the Trust has chosen to target the 0-3 period when the foundations for literacy are laid. The Trust has called for an Early Language Campaign and will use its networks, in conjunction with other participating bodies, to promote awareness of the importance of early language in the home and public spheres. It will encourage carers to listen and talk to their children, read to their children, make children aware of the print in their environment, and visit the library. Promotion of these activities at national and local level will help to ensure that carers have the knowledge and confidence to assist their children's literacy development.

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The Trust maintains an interest in family literacy in its broadest sense and is tracking the policy developments in this area, particularly the Government's national strategy for adult literacy (DfEE, 2001a). Subject to further discussions, the Trust may conduct a survey on family literacy practice in the UK.

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6. Conclusions:

This section highlights significant points from the literature review and the National Literacy Trust's recommendations for future action:

- The concept of parental involvement involves raising the awareness and self-confidence of parents and carers in relation to their children's literacy development and later learning. Its purpose is the inclusion and self-empowerment of parents and carers. In this case, state or professional intervention must not result in carers perceiving it to be a negative intrusion on family life.

- Low achievement is very frequently associated with low socio-economic status, although research suggests that literacy activities such as visiting the library, playing with letters and reading to children can minimise the effects of social disadvantage and the educational background of parents.

- The ingredients for effective parental involvement in literacy include:

-a language and literacy-rich environment in the home (such as books and computers)
-listening and talking to children about books and literacy activities
-high expectations of carers for their children's educational development
-support programmes for carers to learn about literacy and how to tackle any literacy difficulties of their children
-initiatives that encourage and enable carers to improve their own literacy
-recognition by school and Government institutions that home literacy cultures and purposes are equally as important as school literacy.

- The research evidence on parental involvement and literacy attainment favours early intervention over later remediation. To date the most effective age for intervention is between 3-5. Lately, however, researchers are suggesting that literacy intervention should begin at 0-3 and carers are increasingly encouraged to introduce their babies to language and books. Research has been limited to younger (0-11) rather than older children, who may also benefit from parental support even though strategies to include both carers and young adults at this stage are more difficult to achieve. Although peers become more important influences for young adults, carers may continue to influence their children's reading choices and encourage reading for pleasure and talk with their children about what their children read.

- Schools have an important role to play in encouraging parents to become involved in their child's education. It often proves difficult for schools to involve parents from disadvantaged areas. School programmes may, in fact, "exclude" parents and carers who have reading difficulties of their own or who have had poor experiences at school. Home-school agreements, likely to attract parents with positive educational backgrounds, may prove to be ineffective and even counter productive under such circumstances.

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- The most effective strategies for children at school are those that involve structured programmes such as Paired Reading, and including 'Pause, Prompt, Praise,' where both child and adult receive training from a professional. Parental support and parents' awareness of the best strategies to use to overcome reading and writing difficulties are crucial for improving children's learning abilities. Knowledge of specific strategies will enable carers to play an important role in children's development throughout their school years and to provide a basis for lasting partnership between carer and child that cultivates positive learning outcomes.

- It is recommended that a broader view of the benefits of parental involvement on literacy achievement is adopted. Whether or not parental involvement is linked to long-term gains, any contribution of carers toward their children's learning must be recognised as being significant. This broad view of literacy practices in the home builds on Wolfendale's notion of the 'value added' contribution of parents in addition to measurable effects through test scores. This notion of the 'value added' may help to establish a balance between school and parental responsibilities and may limit the pressure placed on carers to promote their children's achievement. The Trust would like any national programme for parental involvement and literacy to take this on board.

- The Trust encourages the central Government to make more resources available for small projects incorporating rigorous evaluation, including family literacy programmes, and for training programmes such as Paired Reading.

- The Trust remains committed to raising awareness of the important role of parents in promoting literacy from 0-16, which it will continue to do through Reading is Fundamental, UK, and the National Reading Campaign. The Trust, which is embarking on an Early Language Campaign, calls for more targeted initiatives in the early years when children's early learning experiences in the home will shape and determine later literacy outcomes at school. It will be through the establishment of language and learning rich environments in the home that children will have satisfying literacy and lifelong learning experiences.

- For more information on the work of the National Literacy Trust, Reading is Fundamental, UK and the National Reading Campaign, telephone on 0207-828-2435 or visit the website: www.literacytrust.org.uk

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Websites:

Parents' Centre, Department for Education and Employment: www.parents.dfee.gov.uk

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Pages for parents, The British Association for Early Childhood Education: www.early-education.org.uk/parents.htm

Resources for parents and teachers, Centre for Paired Learning, University of Dundee: www.dundee.ac.uk/psychology/c_p_lear.htm

Top Tips for parents and teachers, Reading Is Fundamental, UK: www.literacytrust.org.uk/rif/top_tips/index.htm

Innovatory Demonstration Projects, Increasing the Involvement of Parents, school strategies, Basic Skills Agency: www.basic-skills.co.uk/programmes/

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